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ABSTRACT

The task of graduating educationally disadvantaged students from an institution of higher learning is difficult. This difficulty is compounded because the special needs of these students are largely ignored by the institutions they attend. As a result, a disproportionate number of these students experience early failures. With the help of academic advising and other self-help programs, especially during the freshman year, many of the problems that students face can be avoided. The role of the academic advisor, in particular, in helping the minority student succeed in higher education cannot be overemphasized. Academic advising provides educationally disadvantaged students with the opportunity of obtaining equal education by providing both academic and emotional support. (Author/EB)

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The Role Of Academic Advising In Compensatory Education Programs

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We who comprise the higher education community of the late 1970's face a difficult task: how to remove the effects of several years of inadequate educational preparation that characterize educationally disadvantaged minority students, and at the same time, to offer these students equal educational opportunity. For this opportunity to be equal in more than name only, we must provide these students with a means toward this end; special programs, such as the Carnegie-Melion Action Project, are designed to help the educationally disadvantaged help themselves. The need for academic advising in this context is paramount.

The "Educationally Disadvantaged" Student

There is no universal meaning for the phrase "educationally disadvantaged" student. For example, the average total SAT score for minority students at Carnegie-Mellon University (CMU) is approximately 1,000, while the average score for the majority population at CMU is around 1,250. If performance on the SAT exam is indicative of a student's preparation for higher education, then the minority students at CMU are educationally disadvantaged for this institution. However, they are clearly not disadvantaged for a community college if SAT scores are again used as the criteria for predicting success. Using the SAT criteria, it is also clear that the average white student at CMU would be educationally disadvantaged at the California Institute of Technology (Cal Tech) since, traditionally, a third of the entering class at Cal Tech have perfect board scores. Obviously, "educationally disadvantaged" must be defined by each individual institution. Thus, it follows that the educationally disadvantaged students of a particular institution are those whose entering academic credentials, when compared to that institution's criteria for success, are such that either they would have been denied admission to the institution or they would have been admitted only on a marginal basis.

The Need for Academic Advising

Clearly, the task of graduating educationally disadvantaged students from an institution of higher learning is difficult, and this difficulty is compounded because the special needs of these students are largely ignored by the institutions they attend. As a result, a disproportionate number of these students experience early failures. With the help of academic advising and other self-help programs many of the problems these students face can be avoided.

The freshman year is so fundamental, academically, that a poor performance during this period often results in dismissal, a conjecture supported by the data in the following passage, taken from

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a 1974 attrition intervention study at CMU done by Walter Abel.

> Six semesters after the initial enrollment of the engineering and science class entering in 1974 at CMU, the Registrar's official records and College Council's actions were used to determine the academic status of two groups of students as of May 31, 1977. One group was 42 top-ability, underachieving students and the second was 42 classmates who were matched to the underachievers on sex, curriculum, and academic potential. At this date, overall attrition by underachievers was 57% (24 of 42) compared to 14% (6 of 42) for the matched control group. These data clearly show that the first semester performance is a strong indicator of even "top" potential students leaving the university.

Usually failures occur for the following reasons: poor social/psychological adjustment, poor academic preparation, preoccupation with financial affairs, lack of study skills including a failure to use institutional facilities and resources. Most failures are avoidable because we know about the conditions that cause them. We can significantly reduce their effect on students by providing them with a) an atmosphere of social/psychological support and encouragement, b) with well-conceived compensatory educational support services designed to diagnose and remedy potential problems, and c) with effective academic counseling.

Compensatory educational activities are designed to help prevent the academic failure of educationally disadvantaged students. A well-constructed compensatory education support program should include activities similar to those shown in Table I.

TABLE I

I. RECRUITMENT
   - A. Defining Target Population
   - B. Identifying and Enrolling Students

II. PRE-COLLEGE PROGRAMS/ ACTIVITIES FOR ENTERING FRESHMEN
   - A. Assessing Academic Preparation
     1. Diagnostic Testing
     2. Pre-College Academic Programs
        - (i) preparatory work
        - (ii) evaluative counseling
   - B. Planning Academic Year Schedule

III. ACADEMIC YEAR PROGRAMS/ ACTIVITIES
   - A. Academic Supportive Services
     1. Tutoring
     2. Special Courses
     3. Skills Clinics
     4. Counseling
        - (i) Financial
        - (ii) Evaluative
        - (iii) Personal
        - (iv) Career
   - B. Employment Procurement
     1. Summer
     2. Part-time During Academic Year

The Positive Role of the Academic Advisor

The role of the academic advisor in helping the minority student succeed in higher education cannot be over-emphasized. One of the advisor's main functions is to encourage the active participation of his advisees in the compensatory program, because that participation is necessary if the support programs are to be effective.

In order to operate effectively, an advisor must get to know his students. The student's admissions file provides some initial, non-confidential information; and to this can be added the diagnostic data gathered via testing or other means. But neither source of information can replace the first-hand information acquired from frequent meetings with the student. These meetings are themselves sufficient to provide a positive social/psychological environment for the student, and lead to improved academic performance.

The results of the attrition intervention study previously cited support this argument and also support the efficacy of intervention with underachieving students. Seven of the original underachievers, all of whom had left the University either were gone at the end of the first semester or were unreached by the invitation to participate in the intervention program. Amongst the remaining 35 underachievers who could be contacted, three levels of participation occurred. Eleven chose not to attend an initial meeting (NIM), in which the program was explained; 13 attended the initial meeting (IM), but chose not to participate in the group program; and 11 received special group "help" (GRP) from three counselors. Overall attrition in this "contacted" underachieving group is 43% (15 of 35), slightly greater than the 35% attrition of previous classes. The attrition by level of participation, however, is 55% for NIM, 46% for IM, and 27% for GRP. Thus the less students "participated" in the program, the greater the likelihood that they had left school. These results assume added significance when one recalls that because of self-selection, the NIM students, on the average, had the greatest

grade potential; the IM students were intermediate; and the CRP students had the lowest potential.

The attrition data are most compelling, but the icing on the cake comes from an examination of the students' Spring '77 academic performance. (See Table 2).

TABLE 2

Eligible to return Fall, '77[1]	Students Remaining at CMU NIM (N=5)	IM (N=6)	CRP (N=6)
Freshman Predicted QPA	2.86	2.83	2.59
Freshman Achieved QPA	2.21	2.04	2.00
Expected Increase	+.65	+.79	+.59
Spring '77 Achieved QPA	2.86	2.47	2.90
Freshman Pred. vs. Spring '77 Ach.	.00	-.36	+.31
Increase Fall '74 to Spring '77	+.65*	+.43	+.90

Three students, enrolled in special overseas programs which make them eligible to return, did not have grades reported at the time this report was compiled. Therefore, they are omitted from this table.

* Difference significant at the .05 level of confidence

** Difference significant at the .01 level of confidence

The group with the highest potential (NIM) performed this Spring at the expected level; the intermediate potential group (IM) performed about a third of a letter grade (.36) below our predictions; and potentially the lowest group (GRP), the one the counselors worked with directly, is nearly a third of a grade (.31) above the mean predicted for the group. The overall grade average increased for all three groups of students who persisted, but the students who made a really significant gain were those who received group help. The number of students was small, but the results obtained support the positive effects of intervention: advisors who are sympathetic to the problems of educationally disadvantaged students most probably will be able to help the students find the sense of security and emotional stability conducive to academic success.

At CMU, the academic advising process for minority students begins in the summer preceding the freshman year. Students participate in an intensive five-week academic experience designed to diagnose their strengths and weaknesses while still allowing them some brief time to work on strengthening their weak areas.

The efficacy of summer enrichment programs has been established by the University of California at Davis. A statistical study of their summer program was conducted to analyze the impact of the program on college academic work. The study reported two significant results:

1) significant progress was made ins specific subject areas taught in the summer program;

2) attendance in the summer program was worth about a quarter of a grade point (on the average) after one year of college.

At the end of the summer program, the advisor assesses each student's academic strengths and weaknesses, and recommends a specific course of study tailored to the individual needs. For the engineering and science freshmen there are the following options in each subject area:

(a) In Mathematics: Calculus II, Calculus I, Calculus I with structured tutoring, or cross-registering for Algebra and Trigonometry at the University of Pittsburgh.

(b) In Physics: Physics I, Physics I with structured tutoring, or the slower-paced, personalized course, Physics 33-119.

(c) In Chemistry: regular Chemistry I, a special section of Chemistry I which had an extra hour of problem-solving work every week; or a non-credit, Pre-Chemistry course during the fall semester.

In addition, a student may opt to take only four courses instead of the usual five.

The effectiveness of the summer program as a tool for assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the participants is pointed out by the following data: of the 44 minority engineering and science students entering CMU in 1975 who followed the advice of their advisors concerning course selection, only 12, or 27%, were on probation at the end of the fall semester; on the other hand, of the 10 students who did not follow the advice given, 5, or 50%, were on probation.

Although pre-college programs not only provide good diagnostic data on entering students, but also allow these students to make the social/psychological and academic adjustments necessary in order to ensure their academic survival, pre-college programs are not the only way to obtain the information an advisor needs to counsel students effectively. The vehicle is not the issue; the information and its use are.

A specific example of how academic advising that is dependent on the use of hard diagnostic data on students can be successful is worthy of mention.

An Example of Effective Academic Advising

Rose Greene entered CMU as a freshman in 1976. Her intended major was chemistry and she was planning for a career in medicine. Rose participated in the CMU summer program for minority students and was diagnosed as being weak in chemistry and mathematics. She received scores of 50% and 58% respectively on the chemistry and mathematics diagnostic tests. During the summer program. Rose was a D student in both chemistry and calculus. Her average test scores were respectively 62 and 48 in

chemistry and calculus during the summer.

Fortunately, Rose is highly motivated, hard-working and has above-average ability. Although her performance during the summer was not stellar, she spent a lot of time restoring basic skills and improving her weaknesses. At the end of the summer program, the advisory staff of C-MAP recommended that Rose take only four courses and provided her with tutorial support in the beginning of the school term. The result was that not only was Rose's performance during her freshman year outstanding, but her performance during her sophomore year continued to be superior as reflected in the copy of her transcript below. I contend that had Rose begun her studies at CMU in September instead of five weeks earlier in the summer, she would have undoubtedly failed chemistry and calculus and quite possibly other subjects as well.

TABLE 3

Rose Greene's Transcript

1976-1978

Fall, 1976

Course	Grade
Bonding Struct. Prin.	A
Calculus I	A
1st Year Physics IA	A
Emergence Urban World	C

Spring, 1977

Course	Grade
Calculus II	A
Intro. to Appl. Math.	B
1st Year Physics IB	A
Freshman Writing	B

Fall, 1977

Course	Grade
Int. Fr. II Grammar	A
Physics II HT WV OPT	B
Organic Chemistry I	B
Calculus III	A

Spring, 1978

Course	Grade
Organic Chemistry II	A
Dynamics & Equlib.	A
Physics III Elec. Mag	B
Modern Biology	A
Chem. Conference II	A

Rose, of course, is a remarkable example. Without academic advising, and without the academic support programs that provide such services, Rose and many more students probably would drop out of college. We cannot afford to let this happen.

Academic advising provides educationally disadvantaged students with the opportunity of obtaining equal education: it provides not only the academic support these students need to avoid early failure, but also the emotional support that is just as important for academic success as it is for personal success.